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THE FAITHFUL PREACHER.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY OF HANOVER,

AT BETHESDA, OCTOBER 23, 1807.

2 CHRONICLES, XVIII 13.

"And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak."

BY THE REV. CONRAD SPEECE. A. B.

Published by request of the Presbytery.

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LEXINGTON:

PRINTED BY SAMUEL WALKUP.

1807.

DEDICATION.

TO EDWARD GRAHAM ESQUIRE.

DEAR SIR,

PERMIT me to prefix your name to this sermon, and to request your acceptance of it as a token of my esteem and affection. To you it is owing, under God, that my humble talents had an opportunity of being cultivated by liberal education. Your kind patronage, at a time when it was necessary to the commencement of my academical studies, and afterwards when it was equally necessary to their completion, has made impressions on my heart which time will never efface. While this page lives, it shall preserve the expression of my gratitude. With fervent wishes for your happiness, temporal and eternal, I am,

Dear Sir,

Your greatly obliged

And obedient servant,

C. SPEECE.

2 Chron. xviii. 13.

And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak.

The history of Micaiah's prophecy, recorded in this chapter, contains many things worthy of serious attention. Of these the prophet's firm adherence to duty, in the midst of strong temptations to the contrary, is the most affecting and instructive.

Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, had projected an expedition for the conquest of Ramoth-Gilead; and had prevailed with his neighbour Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to assist and accompany him in the war. Jehoshaphat, with his usual piety, wished to know before they set out whether the enterprise was favoured by divine approbation; and for this purpose desired Ahab to "inquire at the word of the Lord."—Accordingly Ahab "gathered together of prophets four hundred men," probably Baal's prophets, who with one voice repeatedly encouraged their master to "go up against Ramoth-Gilead," assuring him that "the Lord would deliver it into his hand." It seems that Jehoshaphat entertained some suspicion of these prophets, notwithstanding their number, unanimity, and apparent confidence. Though he had wanted prudence to avoid an alliance with Ahab, the fruit of a dangerous affinity between their families, and which in the event nearly proved fatal to this amiable but too flexible prince; yet he was now solicitous to be informed truly of the mind of the Lord on the subject, and therefore resolved to pursue the inquiry farther. "Is there not here," said he, "a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" Ahab replied that there was; but added, "I hate him, for he never prophecieth good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla." Such is the gratitude of haughty sinners, especially those in high station, to their honest monitors! However, at the request of the king of Judah, Micaiah was sent for. The messenger, unless we suppose him grossly ignorant of the nature of prophecy, must have been an unprincipled courtier; for without ceremony he desired Micaiah to unite with the other prophets and gratify the king. "Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent: let thy word, therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good."—Here was a tempting opportunity presented to Micaiah to regain the lost favour of his sovereign by flattering his views. On the other hand, he could not but foresee that if in this instance he "prophecied evil," as Ahab phrased it, he should

bring upon himself the united resentments of four hundred false prophets, high in standing at court, and of an impious, arbitrary despot, whom he had already exasperated by frequent reproofs to the utmost limit of forbearance. By pursuing the history a little, we find that his upright conduct was in fact followed by the most afflictive consequences. He was insulted on all sides by contumelious languge, smitten on the face by the leader of the lying prophets, and thrown by the king into an imprisonment peculiarly severe and ignominious. Yet under all the trying circumstances of the case, in the ~~probable~~ apprehension of reproach, imprisonment and death, he did not even hesitate, but instantly and immovably resolved to do his duty. "As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak."

Behold, my reverend brethren, an illustrious example of faithfulness in delivering the messages of God to his creatures! An example manifestly recorded for our imitation. To illustrate this duty, and excite you to the practice of it, are the objects of the present discourse.

Faithfulness signifies a stedfast adherence to duty in opposition to the assaults of temptation. By faithfulness in preaching I understand a habitual, efficacious determination to declare to mankind all things which God hath given us in charge, however we may be tempted to conceal or disguise them; and especially, however disagreeable they may be to our hearers, and whatever painful consequences the declaration of them may bring upon ourselves. An awful task indeed; but indispensably imposed upon every preacher of the word, and which most solemnly regards at once the glory of God, the eternal welfare of our fellow creatures, and the salvation of our own souls.

The duty under consideration resolves itself into two great branches; namely, faithfulness in preparing for the pulpit, and faithfulness in the actual performance of its exercises.

I. He who conceives justly of the preaching of God's word will not dare to undertake it in a hasty, inconsiderate manner. He will contemplate the work with trembling diffidence, and inquire anxiously by what means he may be in some tolerable measure qualified for it.

Besides a competent portion of natural talents, preparation for the pulpit implies a heart fervently devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of mankind; together with a rich furniture of knowledge in the things which are to be preached. The Apostle appears to include both these in his excellent injunction to Timothy: "Study to shew thyself ap-

proved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Without the faithful spirit of preaching men may and, alas, often do intrude themselves into the sacred office. But their labours are a contemptible body without a soul. They themselves are an abomination in the sight of God, and a curse rather than a blessing to their hearers. Now this spirit of zeal and firmness in the ministry is so far from being an effect of chance, or a production of our depraved nature, that it is one of the most noble and precious fruits of divine grace in the heart. It is therefore to be sought by continual and earnest prayer. If we are required to call upon God with humble supplication even for the commonest blessings, we ought more especially to implore of him this heavenly elevation above the allurements and the terrours of the world in discharging the arduous duties of our ministry. And while we pray for this most necessary endowment, let us also labour to cultivate it in ourselves by constant practice, as well as by reflection on those weighty motives which urge us to fidelity, and of which some account will be attempted in a future part of this discourse.

But to a faithful spirit must be added a rich furniture of knowledge in divine things. For how can any man teach others what he knows not himself? Now there are but two conceivable ways by which this knowledge can be acquired. The one is immediate revelation from heaven, otherwise called the inspiration of suggestion, which supercedes all the ordinary processes of the mind in the discovery of truth. The other is dilligent study, under the common superintendence of God the Father of lights and Giver of wisdom.—As to immediate revelation, we dare not pretend to it, were we so disposed, without those attestations of miraculous power by which the extraordinary missions of the Apostles and their inspired predecessors were established, and which we know ourselves not to possess. To set up such a claim without miraculous proof would be to insult the common sense of mankind. We do indeed feel that we need, and we hope to obtain a certain gracious influence from God, which while it sanctifies the heart tends also to invigorate and direct the understanding in the pursuit of religious knowledge; an influence which may without impropriety be termed an inspiration from heaven. We believe that those who fear and serve God have much better prospects of attaining wisdom in things of this nature than men of a con-

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* 2 *Tim. ii.* 15.

trary character. For "the meek will God guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way."* But we claim no such inspiration as supersedes the exertion of our own mental powers; no such teaching of the Spirit as renders study and literature useless in the sacred office. If there are any who advance such high claims, we will not, we cannot believe them without the proof already mentioned. If study without prayer has been justly denominated atheism, it is equally true that prayer without study is presumption. It remains, therefore, that we faithfully devote ourselves to study as a necessary preparative for the pulpit. The exhortation of the Apostle to Timothy is full and express to this purpose. "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."†

The great subject of all our ministerial studies is the holy scriptures. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."‡ It is the word of God that we are emphatically commanded to preach;§ because this alone is able to make us and our hearers wise unto salvation.

May I presume to offer a few remarks on what appears to me the best method of studying the holy scriptures? Instead of allegorizing and torturing them into any meaning which fancy may suggest; instead of indolent recumbency on the judgment of a favourite commentator or paraphrast; instead of toiling through many vast volumes of what is called systematick divinity, tinctured as they generally are with a subtile philosophy quite foreign from the simplicity of divine revelation; permit me earnestly to urge the direct, critical study of the scriptures in their original languages.—It would be deplorable indeed if no man could be saved without reading his bible in Greek or Hebrew. Happily this is not the case. But is it not obviously the duty of those who are appointed specially to study and teach religion that they advance, if possible, to the fountain of divine instruc-

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* *Ps. xxv.* 9.
† 1 *Tim. iv.* 13, 14, 15, 16.
‡ 2 *Tim. iii.* 16, 17.
§ 2 *Tim. iv.* 2.

tion, and draw thence living water in its utmost purity? Our translation of the bible, valuable as it truly is, was made by uninspired and fallible men like ourselves; and it is impossible that any such translation should be equal to the original. We have the same right that our predecessors had, together with advantages in some respects superior to theirs, accumulated by the labours of genius and learning, to examine the authentick records of our religion for ourselves.—The study of the original scriptures, then, should be our chief and daily employment. And those auxiliary branches of knowledge which bear most directly upon this great object, should engage much of our esteem and attention. In this view let me recommend the reading and comparing of the best versions of scripture, antient and modern; the accurate investigation of the laws, customs, rites and ceremonies of the Jews, and of other nations mentioned in sacred history; an extensive acquaintance with the history of the Christian Church, and the writings of its earliest fathers. To these should be added the helps to be obtained from the works of learned biblical criticks and commentators of every age and of different persuasions. I say of different persuasions; for it is a narrow and hurtful prejudice to suppose hat all useful learning is confined to writers of our own denomination. Such various aids are highly profitable to the student who has talents, opportunity and prudence to use them properly; who respectfully seeks their assistance without submitting tamely and blindly to their authority. For let it ever be remembered that in these things we have but one master, even God; and to him we are to give an account of our sentiments as well as of our actions.

As to systematick divinity, there is nothing surprising in its long and extensive prevalence in the Christian world: for if we love knowledge at all, we are naturally fond of seeing it in the shape of a system. But I humbly apprehend that this spirit has generally been carried to extremes in the church, and has hindered instead of advancing the progress of scriptural knowledge. Divine truths do certainly constitute a system the most harmonious and perfect. To its all-wise Author it can exhibit nothing obscure or doubtful. But to minds weak and limited as ours, especially in this infant state of our existence, many things are and must remain unsearchable. It is not permitted to us to satisfy always our restless curiosity, and to trace clearly those mysterious connexions which unite the truths of revelation with each other. We may eagerly attach ourselves to some favourite scheme, some plausible philosophical theory of religion

which professes to remove all difficulties; and then collect disjointed portions of scripture to defend it against the assaults of other theories. We may toil away our days and our strength in attempting to solve, with the aid of the abstrusest dialectick, a thousand curious questions of no importance, and which never can be solved. Such are the common consequences of an excessive attachment to system.—But would it not be far better to apply ourselves directly and vigorously to the volume of inspiration, and thence learn with humility of heart what God has revealed? Would it not be going far enough in the way of system to take care that we do not adopt nor teach doctrines plainly inconsistent with the sacred standard and with each other? In a word is it not the part of wisdom to discern where our curious inquiries ought to stop; and to acknowledge without discontent our ignorance of things which need not and cannot be known? A concise, comprehensive treatise, aranged with some degree of systematick order, may be proper enough to suggest subjects for meditation, and to direct the student to useful reading. But to substitute human systems for the immediate study of God's word is something worse than a very circuitous path to the attainment of religious knowledge. The method of study which has been stated is indeed not less extensive or laborious. But it is more pleasing to the real lover of truth; better calculated to make us well acquainted with the sacred oracles, which are to be the subject of our preaching, and I think also, more likely to unite in sentiment all who sincerely reverence the book of God.

If any man should argue that since our version of the bible is confessedly just in the main, free from defect in fundamentals, there is no need of such a critical and laborious study of the original; he would betray very unworthy notions of the inspired volume, and would contradict its own express declarations. The scripture is not only profitable in fundamental articles: "all scripture is profitable."* Every particle of it is of some importance to be understood. The minutest portions of its history, its doctrine and its precepts are useful either in themselves or as they serve to shed light and beauty upon other passages.

In due subordination to the study of the scriptures, every competent judge will readily acknowledge the importance of science and elegant literature to the preacher as improving his preparation for the pulpit. Science strengthens our rational powers; gives us the valuable knowledge of our a-

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* 2 *Tim. iii.* 16.

nimal, intellectual and moral nature; and by making us acquainted with the works of God elevates our conceptions of his wisdom, power, goodness and universal government.— The various stores of polite literature furnish the sacred orator with a rich fund of materials for the pleasing expression and impressive illustration of divine truth. On this copious subject my limits do not permit me to enlarge.— But I cannot forbear to observe that while religion disdains the artifices of meretricious ornament, and appears to the best advantage in its own glorious simplicity, no good reason has ever been assigned for degrading it, to the disgust of all correct taste, by incoherence of thought or vulgarity of expression.

It becomes us however, to guard against that pride which considerable attainments even in sacred knowledge, as well as in other branches of learning, are apt to excite in the deceitful heart of man. For this purpose, besides direct and habitual prayer for the grace of humility, we should often descend from the paths of critical study to the reading of the best devotional and practical treatises. By these means we shall imbibe and preserve the spirit of christian simplicity; we shall learn for ourselves how to reduce divine truth to practice; and perceive how absolutely we depend upon the grace of God to save us from sin and to strengthen us for his service. This kind of reading is also a very necessary part of a due preparation for preaching. All revealed truths are intended for practical utility: and we shall demonstrate those truths to little purpose unless we know how to inculcate them with this view, and lead our hearers to adopt them as effectual principles of piety and virtue.

In connexion with this suffer me to recommend frequent and familiar conversation with the people individually on experimental religion. Besides other reasons for it, such conversation, even with the plainest persons, will afford us many an useful hint of instruction on the various operations of grace and of sin in the soul, which might never have occurred to us in reading or meditation. This is a most desirable species of knowledge to a faithful preacher. The work of the Holy Spirit unites great uniformity with great varieties. These varieties we must pursue with patient industry, that we may rightly divide the word of truth, giving to every hearer his proper portion of instruction, reproof, or encouragement, moulded in conformity to the particular circumstances of his case.

I have not undertaken to ascertain, because it cannot be precisely ascertained what quantity of literary or even of

theological knowledge is universally essential to the ministry. It is evident that they who are vested with the office should be "apt," that is, well qualified "to teach; not novices."* Our church has laid it down as a general rule, and surely it is a very judicious one, that candidates for the ministry shall have gone through a course of liberal education, as well as made some competent progress in theological studies. But we are not permitted to stop here. Let it be remembered that in taking upon us this extensive charge of religious instruction we should devote ourselves to a life of study, so far as health and opportunity may be afforded. We should labour unremittingly to enlarge and improve our own minds, that we may bring out of our treasure things new and old for the edification of the people. If at any period we suffer ourselves to lose the relish and habit of study, if we make no fresh acquisitions of knowledge; if we neglect our preparations, whether general or particular for the service of the sanctuary; we may assure ourselves that our stock of materials will soon be exhausted, and our publick discourses, wanting variety to engage attention and accuracy to enforce conviction, will become flat and uninteresting to the generality of our hearers.

Allow me, brethren, to close this part of the subject by warning you against some dangerous temptations to unfaithfulness in preparing for the exercises of the pulpit.

The first I shall mention is the spirit of indolence. The excessive love of ease is seldom considered in the serious light that it ought to be, as a sinful propensity, fraught with extensive mischief and directly contrary to the tenour of our holy religion It is a vice exceedingly prevalent; and we are as liable to its attacks as others. If the foregoing account of a due preparation for preaching be at all correct, it implies great and persevering exertion of our faculties, and consequently much resolution and vigilance against the encroachments of an indolent disposition. We do indeed disapprove the practice of reading sermons; and in my opinion for very substantial reasons. But this very thing may become a snare to us, so as to render our sermons hasty and undigested harangues, little calculated to afford instruction to the hearers. If in other cases we labour to do things well in proportion to their supposed importance, are not our utmost exertions due to the preaching of God's holy word in the most dignified and useful manner? Surely we of all men

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* 1 *Tim. iii.* 2, 6.

should take care "not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."*

A second object of caution is what I venture to name the spirit of profane literature. A taste for reading and study, acquired in early life, is much less apt to be wholly lost than to be perverted into wrong channels. It has been already observed that science and elegant literature may be useful to us, provided they are properly subordinated to our great purpose of understanding and preaching the word of God. But as many studies of a scientifick or literary kind are less laborious, as well as more alluring to the imagination, than those of biblical criticism and theology; as success in them promises to our vanity a more extensive fame in the world; we are too liable to be drawn away after them with an excessive fondness, quite unsuitable to our sacred functions and ruinous to our progress in divine knowledge. A teacher of religion ought carefully to watch and check these dangerous tendencies of the mind. Holiness to the Lord should be inscribed even on all his studies. And it would be miserable folly to exchange this important characteristick of our profession for the greatest pleasures or the highest fame in human science or literature. Such pursuits may, in this point of view, justly be denominated profane and unlawful.

A third temptation to neglect our preparatory studies is the supposed fact, by many confidently asserted, that illiterate and unstudious preachers are the most successful in the propagation of religion. Now it is true that a very learned ministry may be destitute of the requisite zeal and faithfulness, and consequently destitute of any considerable utility. And such is the inscrutable sovereignty of God's gracious influences that we sometimes see even the most able and devoted ministers of Christ labour long in the vineyard without much visible fruit of their labours; while others of far inferiour qualifications are made more successful in turning sinners from their evil ways. But after all, is not religion a reasonable service? Is not a just exhibition of its doctrines, precepts, promises and threatenings the great instrument appointed by divine constitution for the salvation of mankind? Shall we without serious examination admit a position pregnant with the strange conclusion that a learned must necessarily be an unfaithful ministry? Or that God should raise up men of talents and literary improvements, endow them with fervent zeal for his glory, and require them to consecrate all their time and abilities to the service of his

* *Rom. xii.* 11.

sanctuary; and yet uniformly or generally prefer weak, illiterate and ignorant men in carrying on the great designs of his kingdom? Rather than adopt these extravagant ideas I may be compelled to suspect that among the advocates of an ignorant clergy many things are made to pass for conversion; faith, love, religious experience and bearing the cross of Christ which have, in reality, little or nothing of the spirit of true religion in them. It may be observed also that so far as illiterate teachers and their flocks do attain to religious knowledge and practice they are much indebted, however unwilling to own the obligation, to the preaching and writings of learned ministers. In fine, if there be still any difficulty in the case, it cannot be so strong as to warrant our renunciation or neglect of duties prescribed by the word of God and the soundest reason.

The last danger I shall mention, and perhaps the greatest of all, is that of a wordly spirit; an undue thirst for the pleasures, the honours, and especially the riches of the present life. Let me not be misunderstood on this subject.—A minister of Christ, having the same common nature, feels the same common wants with other men. He can no more subsist than they without food, raiment and other needful accommodations. He has a right as well as they to become a husband, a father, the head of a family. And when he does, it is among his primary duties to provide for those of his own household. For this provision, indeed, he has a perfect claim upon the people, if they are able to support him; for "so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel."* But if, as sometimes happens, the people are unable, or, which is oftener the case, if they are unwilling to give their pastor the necessary support; he is not only permitted but required to betake himself for support to other resources. In such a situation he must withdraw a portion of his time from ministerial studies and labours, and do from absolute necessity what the Apostles did from prudential choice, work with his hands; or by some other employment not misbecoming a Christian provide things honest in the sight of all men for himself and those who depend upon him. But let ministers beware of the spirit of luxurious living; of too much costliness and splendour in their houses, furniture, tables, dress, or equipage. Let them endeavour to qualify their children for usefulness by good education; but beware of indulging them in expensive as well as in criminal pleasures; or of

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* 1 *Cor.* ix. 14.

aiming to accumulate large fortunes for them by employing in secular avocations the time and attention which ought to be devoted to sacred duties. On such a subject minute and specifick rules are not to be expected. But surely we need to use great watchfulness in these things if we would be found faithful to our God, our fellow creatures and ourselves. We should pray without ceasing for the heavenly, self-denying mind which was in Christ Jesus our Lord.—The indulgence of a worldly spirit will soon impair our ministerial character in the publick estimation, and greatly injure the life and efficacy of our ministerial labours. While, therefore, many ignorantly or maliciously charge us with the inordinate love of money, let us take care that the heavy accusation may never be confirmed by our own consciences. If the people of God universally are required to walk as strangers and pilgrims in the world, to set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth, yea to be dead to the world that they may live unto God; a double portion of these holy tempers is manifestly necessary to us who have consecrated ourselves to the ministry of the gospel. Whenever we think justly of our awful functions we naturally exclaim, as even an Apostle did "who is sufficient for these things?"* None of us, assuredly, without the supports of almighty grace. How then shall we be able to finish our course with joy, or to appear with confidence before our God, if we forfeit his favour by an excessive attachment to the pursuits and gratifications of the present world? May God preserve us from a catastrophe so dreadful!

II. Having considered what belongs to faithfulness in preparing for the pulpit, let us now proceed to contemplate the same faithfulness in the actual performance of its exercises. It implies, comprehensively speaking, a firm undisguised declaration of all things which God hath given us in charge, that is, of all things contained in his holy word.—We are to be animated with Micaiah's spirit of integrity and zeal: "even what our God saith, that are we to speak." But the subject requires to be unfolded in a more particular manner.

In the first place, then, the faithful preacher will boldly and explicitly proclaim the doctrines of divine truth, however contrary they may be to the prejudices or passions of his hearers, and whatever painful consequences may thence ensue to himself.

There is indeed a certain prudence in preaching the doc-

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* *2 Cor. ii.* 16.

trines of revelation, in regard not only to the manner but to the matter also: a prudence undoubtedly lawful, and sometimes highly expedient. It is not our duty to be always dwelling on a few points, merely because they are peculiarly mysterious in themselves, or peculiarly disagreeable to the world; and then, as the manner of some is, to charge our brethren with culpable timidity, because they will not imitate us in this injudicious conduct. Not so did the Apostle Paul, one of the most faithful of preachers. "I have fed you," says he, "with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet now are ye able."* Yea, our Lord himself used the same prudence in instructing his disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now."† At the same time it becomes us to beware of mistaking or abusing this prudence. Let it be remembered as a fundamental principle that no truth whatever has been revealed from heaven devoid of all utility, or intended to be buried in perpetual silence. We are conscientiously to consider and judge when any truth is needful to be preached to the people; and when the moment arrives we are to go forward and preach it without fear of consequences.

This position shall be illustrated by a reference to several particular doctrines. And the task will be the more pleasing, as those doctrines which are the most unacceptable to a sinful world, and which therefore bring the preacher's faithfulness most strongly to the trial, are precisely the most important and essential truths of our holy religion.

My first instance shall be the doctrine of the Trinity.—This is purely a matter of revelation, and signifies that in the eternal Godhead there are three, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, whom we call divine Persons, because personal properties and agencies are ascribed to them; and that these three are one God. Thus Christians are baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."‡ And we are informed that "there are three who bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word," which is another name for the Son, "and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one."§ The opposers of this doctrine, whether avowed enemies or treacherous friends to the book of God, are men who boast much of their superiour reason and philosophy; who pretend, for it is indeed no more than a miserable pretence, to believe nothing which they cannot fully compre-

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* *1 Cor. iii. 2.* † *John xvi. 12.*
‡ *Matt. xxviii. 19.* § *1 John v. 7.*

hend. And many a bitter sarcasm do they fling upon the absurdity of asserting three Gods to be one God; an absurdity, however, of their own invention, for it is not the faith of Christians. We ought to acknowledge the doctrine of the triune God to be an inexplicable mystery; to beware of adopting any really inconsistent notions of it, or of advancing any thing farther in it than the holy scriptures clearly exhibit. For as to those writers who have attempted by philosophical illustration to bring it down to the level of human comprehension, they seem to me, however upright their intentions, to have done no service to the cause, nor much honor to their own understandings. But so far as God has been pleased to reveal it, we are to preach the doctrine with all firmness and perseverance. For it is so remote from being merely a point of abstruse speculation, that it is essentially interwoven with the great scheme of our salvation by Jesus Christ. We find in fact that those who reject this truth soon make shipwreck of the whole faith of the gospel.

Another doctrine which brings the faithfulness of the preacher severely to the test is that of the fall of man, commonly called the doctrine of original sin. The scriptures teach us that by the sin of the first man, our federal representative in the covenant of works, the whole human race have fallen from original rectitude into a state of depravity, guilt and condemnation. Here we are informed that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners;* that "in Adam all die;"† that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;"‡ that "all the world is become guilty before God;"§ and that "we are by nature children of wrath,"¶ under the curse of the Almighty. Indeed this doctrine is inscribed, either directly or indirectly, upon every page of the bible, and is abundantly confirmed by the history and experience of mankind. Whatever insolvable difficulties may attend it, the denial of it would overwhelm us with far more numerous and greater difficulties; would lead us rapidly to infidelity, and even to atheism itself.—Yet evident as the truth is, the man who preaches it faithfully must expect to be treated by many as a gloomy enthusiast, a patron of absurdity, a malignant calumniator of his species. Ridicule will sneer, pride will rage, and sophestry will fabricate a thousand subtle theories to refute the testi-

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* *Rom. v.* 19.
† 1 *Cor. xv.* 22.
‡ *Rom. v.* 12.
§ *Rom. iii.* 19.
¶ *Eph. ii.* 3.

monies of God's word, or to explain them away. Some fondly dream that the soul of man at first is like a sheet of fair paper, susceptible alike of good or evil impressions; and talk much of education, not religious but philosophical education, as the only thing necessary to make us wise, virtuous and happy. Some, by lowering the standard of moral duty almost to nothing, persuade themselves that there is, without any iufluence of divine grace, a vast quantity of virtue and goodness in the world; and that only a few very atrocious sinners can fail of meeting the approbation of their Maker. Others celebrate highly a certain seed of grace given to all men before they are born, and strongly inclining them to that which is good: which seed of grace, however, they tell us, with a wild confusion of ideas, God was bound in justice to bestow upon us, or else to have annihilated us in what they call our seminal state. And others, more hardy than all the rest, eagerly draw the conclusion that because mankind are heriditary sinners, therefore they are not sinners at all in a proper sense, nor punishable for their transgressions of moral order. An argument, by the way, which no man admits when pleaded by any but himself in regard to the duties which mankind owe to each other. All these and other such idle reveries we are to condemn and refute, not by overbearing, dogmatical assertion, but by the authority of scripture and sound reason. We ought especially to guard our hearers against the fatal opinion that heriditary depravity excuses the sinner. This is done by properly explaining the nature of that depravity. It is our voluntary crime, under which we are no way necessitated to continue one moment longer than we freely choose to continue. No man ever was, nor in the nature of things can be compelled to the commission of any sin contrary to the present choice of his own heart. The fall has laid us under no other kind of inability to love and serve God than the inability of the cruel man to be merciful, the debauchee to be chaste, or the miser to be generous. And who would allow such characters to plead this inability as an excuse for their vices? In a word, the reason why the sinner cannot perfectly comply with his whole duty is that he will not. At the same time, while we maintain the voluntary nature of this moral disease of the soul, we are not to lose sight of its deep inveteracy, and utter incurableness by human means. "In us, that is in our flesh dwelleth no good thing:"* there is in our depraved nature no particle of real holiness, no principle by

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* *Rom. vii.* 18.

which we may, either in whole or in part, obtain deliverance from sin and its tremendous consequences. The gospel continually proceeds upon the ground of our ruined and desperate condition; every where takes it for granted that we are lost in sin; without strength to extricate ourselves; and that "judgment hath come upon all men to condemnation."* Nor can we possibly be saved by faith in Jesus Christ without the humbling conviction that such are indeed our deplorable circumstances. In the midst, therefore, of scorn and opposition, of sarcasm and sophistry, we are to proclaim this fundamental doctrine frequently, with united compassion and faithfulness. We are to insist on it firmly that mankind are by nature universally guilty, condemned and helpless; and consequently that we can only be saved by the mercy of God, mercy which he has a sovereign right, without any impeachment of his justice or his goodness, to bestow upon one and withhold from another, as his infinite wisdom may judge proper.

The third instance which I shall use to illustrate the spirit of faithful preaching is the doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ. This is an essential pillar of that constitution of grace whence we derive our most beloved title of ministers of the gospel. But wherein consists the great faithfulness or self-denial of preaching this glorious doctrine? I answer, were we to content ourselves with representing Jesus Christ as a good man merely, who taught excellent morality, and left us a noble example of righteousness and of patience under sufferings; all would pass off smoothly and quietly enough. Or should we occasionally mention to our hearers in a vague and general way the merits of Christ, as necessary to supply the little defficiencies of their own obedience to the laws of God; still we should be heard patiently, and meet with little or no oposition on the subject even from the proudest sinners. They would, as indeed they often do, very familiarly call Jesus Christ their Lord and their Saviour. But we must go far, very far beyond all this in preaching the truth under consideration.—Jesus has indeed taught us excellent rules of duty, and left us a precious example of their practice: but this is only a subordinate part of what he has done for our salvation.—His sacred merits were intended for no such purpose as to be made a patch upon the defective robe of our own righteousness. No; instead of all such presumptuous curtailing and perversion of the gospel, we are to preach it in its una-

* *Rom. v.* 18.

dulterated purity and undiminished fullness. We are to proclaim Jesus Christ as "God manifest in the flesh,"* the almighty and only Deliverer of wretched sinners. We are to assert the perfect vicarious satisfaction rendered by him to divine justice, including his spotless obedience and atoning death, summarily called in one word his righteousness, imputed to all who believe, as the only ground of our justification before God and title to eternal life. For the scriptures call the Son of God "the Lord our righteousness;"† "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."‡ We are told that "as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous."§ And the doctrine of his atoning death is especially insisted on, because it is at once essential to our salvation, and peculiarly opposed by the pride of the carnal heart. Thus we are informed that "he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;"¶ and that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace."** Indeed there is no truth more abundantly inculcated throughout the sacred oracles, or in a manner less capable of misconstruction, than this of our acceptance with God only by the meritorious obedience and sufferings of his Son Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, to require all men, the great, the wise, the honourable, as well as the abject, the ignorant, the abandoned, to bow before the feet of our Redeemer, and renouncing every other hope, to implore the mercy of God through the righteousness of his Son.—We are to encourage the contrite and penitent to take refuge from the storms of divine wrath by faith in the Lord Jesus, whose arms are graciously open for the reception of every returning prodigal. For "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."†† Such is the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ. And what hosts of opponents has it excited in the world through every age! The philosophers of vanity amuse them-

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* 1 *Tim. iii.* 16.
‡ *Rom. x.* 4.
¶ *Gal. iii.* 13.
†† *John iii.* 16.
† *Jer. xxiii.* 6; & *xxxiii.* 16.
§ *Rom. v.* 18, 19.
** *Eph. i.* 7. *Col. i.* 14.

selves with captious objections against the acknowledged mystery of the incarnation; and against the justice of a vicarious satisfaction, as if they knew better than the Omniscient upon what principles it befits him to support his laws or dispense his mercy. The proud reject with contempt the mortifying terms of the gospel. The decent and honourable cleave to their beloved morality, such as it is; and leave it to publicans and harlots to glory, if they please, in a crucified Saviour. In the mean time, the great mass of mankind, busied with worldly pursuits and blind to their dreadful condition, turn away with disgust or indifference from all the kind admonitions and invitations of divine mercy, and crowd the broad road to eternal destruction. For these things, brethren, our souls should weep in secret places.—But the faithful preacher will not therefore be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, nor cease to proclaim the good tidings with all perseverance. For though "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; unto us who are saved it is the power of God."* And it is by the preaching of the cross that God will in due time gather the whole number of his elect, to rejoice in his presence forever and ever.

A fourth doctrine well suited to exercise faithfulness in the pulpit is that of effectual grace in conversion. Considering the total depravity of our fallen nature, it is reasonable to suppose that any method of salvation revealed from heaven must include a great change in our moral tempers and conduct. But more particularly, the gospel requires repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ as absolutely prerequisite, though not meritoriously contributive, to our justification. Now repentance and faith are holy acts of the soul. And whence shall sinful man derive the dispositions implied in the performance of them? Should we flatter our hearers that they may very easily create these dispositions in themselves with a little assistance from above, the pride of their hearts would be soothed; and we might throw out now and then a cursory hint about divine assistance to their own endeavours, without incurring much of their resentment or opposition. But if we look into the scriptures we shall find that God hath given us in charge a very different doctrine on this subject. He does indeed require, and we are to require in his name, that sinners return to him without delay, by a genuine repentance and a cordial faith in Jesus Christ. For this is their duty

* 1 *Cor. i.* 18.

as well as their interest; and they are under no natural inability to comply immediately with the injunction. But "they that are in the flesh cannot please God;"* for "the carnal mind is enmity against God;†" and we are all by nature spiritually dead, "dead in trespasses and sins."‡ We are, therefore, abundantly taught to ascribe our conversion to the gracious agency of God as its proper and only efficient cause; or more strictly speaking, to the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit whose peculiar office it is in the economy of redemption. Thus our Lord asserts in the most emphatical manner that "we must be born again, born of the Spirit; otherwise we cannot see nor enter into the kingdom of God."§ It is by the operation of the Spirit that we believe to the saving of the soul; for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."¶ In fine, "we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."** Such is the account which the scriptures give us of the origin of our conversion to God. Like the other doctrines of the gospel it is perfectly adapted to our deplorable situation. But at the same time, like those other doctrines its direct tendency is to exalt the grace of God at the expense of human pride and self-sufficiency. We are not to be surprised, therefore, if we meet with much opposition in preaching it to the world. Some find much matter for impious sneering in the unsearchable mysteriousness of the Holy Spirit's operations. Others, calling themselves the best and most enlightened friends of divine truth, either ignorantly or wilfully reject the doctrine, evident as it is, of effectual, distinguishing grace; and maintain that God only makes certain exhibitions of the gospel to the minds of men, and to the minds of all alike; leaving it to their own self-determining wills finally to decide whether or not those exhibitions of truth shall issue in their conversion. And the great multitude of profane and sensual sinners treat with scorn the whole doctrine of conversion and the work of the spirit in it; charging upon it all the wild and lamentable extravagancies which enthusiasts and impostors have practised under the abused name of experimental religion. What then shall we do in the midst of so much contempt and opposition? Shall we join with those who unscripturally represent the grace of God as depending for its efficacy on the will of

* *Rom. viii.* 8. † *Rom. viii.* 7.
‡ *Eph. ii.* 1. § *John iii.*
¶ 1 *Cor. xii.* 3. ** 1 *Cor. vi.* 11.

man? Shall we avoid the odious charge of enthusiasm or hypocrisy by saying with our infidel adversaries that the effectual working of God's mighty power in the soul is only the dream of a disordered imagination? God forbid! No; let us preserve and inculcate the truth delivered to us with unwavering resolution and constancy; assuring ourselves that our God will bear his invincible testimony to it in the hearts of as many as he hath chosen to eternal life.

In near connexion with this I mention a fifth doctrine as a test of ministerial faithfulness, namely the necessity of a holy life, progressing unto complete sanctification, in order to our reception into God's heavenly kingdom. This is manifestly a leading truth of divine revelation. Christians are called "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* We are "taught by the grace of God which bringeth salvation that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."† We are enjoined to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;"‡ to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."§ For though our good works have no part in procuring our pardon or title to heaven, they are absolutely necessary as fruits and evidences of our faith, and means of adorning our Christian profession.—Yea, we do not more essentially need to be justified by the righteousness of Christ than we need to be sanctified by his word and Spirit, brought to the full exercise of every holy affection, as a qualification for our enjoyment of eternal felicity. Now it is precisely the holiness of our religion that makes it so disagreeable to the unregenerate part of mankind. Some it drives, or rather they are driven by their own pride, selfishness and sensual passions to infidelity: they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Many talk in a vague, unmeaning way about the mercy of God to the world by Jesus Christ, whom they call their Saviour, and whose blessings they presumptuously hope to participate, though they are evidently and even avowedly strangers to the converting and sanctifying grace of

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* *Eph. ii.* 10.
† *Tit. ii.* 11, 12, 13, 14.
‡ *Phil. ii.* 12.
§ *Heb. xii.* 14.

God. But of all shapes which the spirit of opposition to holiness assumes the most odious and impious is that of antinomian professors of religion; who dare to sin because the grace of God abounds, and neglect good works under pretence of honouring the mediatorial work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In direct opposition to the whole current of scripture they have the effrontery to plead the precious doctrines of God's electing love and the sure perseverance of the saints unto eternal life as a justification of their sloth in the duties of Christianity. When we faithfully preach the doctrine under consideration, such persons never fail to raise a mighty cry of complaint; stigmatizing us as legal preachers, disturbers of the peace of God's dear children, and disparagers of his sovereign grace. But let men of corrupt minds say what they will, it becomes every minister of God solemnly to urge that faith in Christ, and to encourage that faith only, which works by love, purifies the heart and overcomes the world. While we assert that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to the mercy of God that we are saved,"* let us also "affirm constantly that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works;"† yea, that they should "be stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."‡ The time is coming when all those confident pretenders to religion who are destitute of the evidence of holiness to support their claim shall hear that tremendous rebuke, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."§

The last doctrine by which I shall illustrate the great duty of faithful preaching is that of the eternal punishment of all who die in impenitency. It requires no self-denial to animate the people of God in their Christian warfare by the hope of a blessed immortality. But to proclaim against the wicked the threatenings of the Almighty, to bring before their view the terrours of the judgment-day, is a task which will try our faithfulness indeed; for it is to ourselves much the most painful duty of our ministerial office. The endless punishment of the wicked in hell is a truth taught by the scriptures with abundant evidence. It is often expressly asserted, and follows also by infallible consequence from other doctrines. It will be sufficient, however, for my present purpose to refer to the solemn account of the final judg-

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* *Tit. iii.* 5.
† *Tit. iii.* 8.
‡ 1 *Cor. xv.* 58.
§ *Matt. vii.* 23.

ment given us by the Judge himself, our Lord Jesus Christ. After welcoming the righteous to the kingdom prepared for them, he will say to the wicked, " depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life eternal."* Here is no room to evade the awful truth. For the very same duration is attributed to the happiness of the righteous and the misery of the wicked: nor does language afford a stronger word to express the eternal existence of God himself. Such then is the fearful doom which awaits impenitent sinners in that state to which they are hastening; the intolerable wrath of God Almighty, the gloom of endless despair, the unremitting tortures of that dungeon where " there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,"† " where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."‡ What volumes of sophistry have been invented to extinguish the fear of everlasting misery by men whose pride and love of sinful pleasure would not permit them to obey the gospel! Some seek refuge in the horrible and most degrading hope of annihilation. Others labour to believe that sin is a trifle which cannot possibly deserve a perpetual punishment; or that all the holy attributes of Jehovah shall, for the sake of obstinate rebels, be absorbed in his mercy, which will bring their punishment sooner or later to an end. Many make light of eternal damnation without pretending to reason at all on the subject. And multitudes who profess to believe the doctrine as we do are yet so little impressed by it that they easily procrastinate all serious concern about it, and are offended with us for sounding in their ears the terrours of the Lord. Thus do sinners slumber and dream on the brink of perdition.— It is our duty, brethren to awake them, if possible, from this fatal security. Let us refute their sophistry when it needs to be refuted; let us pity their folly, forgive their blind resentment, and with all compassion and importunity warn them to fly from the wrath to come. Let not their charging us with harshness and severity deter us from dealing honestly with them. Their precious souls are in danger.— There is yet hope concerning them; but it may soon be over, and they may sink beyond the reach of mercy. Undesirable as it is to a benevolent mind to cause pain, the faithful preacher will not shrink from the task when it becomes necessary: and a certain holy sternness of denunciation,

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* *Matt. xxv.* 41, 46. † *Matt. viii.* 12.
‡ *Mark ix.* 44.

mingled with persuasive tenderness, will often be the highest proof he can give of his concern for the salvation of his hearers.

Thus far concerning faithfulness in preaching the doctrines of God's word.

It remains to be observed, in the second place, that the faithful preacher will be equally sincere, equally unmoved by opposition, in the display and inculcation of practical religion.

As every doctrine which the scriptures teach is in some way or other a practical principle, and the practice of religion follows naturally from its doctrines, it may appear to a superficial observer that the whole work of the sacred desk is sufficiently discharged by doctrinal instruction. But no man can think so who is tolerably acquainted with human nature. Our hearers need as much, and for the same reasons, our faithful labour to exhibit and impress the duties of the Christian life as to unfold and establish the doctrines on which those duties are founded. For the one purpose as well as the other "precept must be upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little."* Hence the book of God is at least as much occupied in practical as in doctrinal preaching. Divine truths, therefore, should be preached with an evident and avowed view to practice. With their discussion in the pulpit we should always unite more or less of their application to the heart and life, of earnest warnings against sin and exhortations to holiness. Yea, so important are things of this kind that they ought frequently to be made principal subjects of our publick discourses. And probably it is in this branch of preaching that our faithfulness will be most severely tried. Any divine truth handled with a frigid abstraction from practical consequences will excite but little resentment; and indeed, in the generality of hearers, but little attention. But when we strenuously join the practice with the theory of religion in our sermons the effect will be very different. The wicked of every description hate and oppose the doctrines of the gospel for the very same reason that Christians love them, namely that they are doctrines according to godliness. This matter will be better understood by entering a little into particulars.

The first constituent of practical religion is the exercise of holy affections. These are the primary fruits of the Holy Spirit's renovating and sanctifying work by the applicati-

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* *Isa. xxviii.* 10.

on of divine truth; and include all that judicious Christians mean by experimental religion. It is abundantly evident that the scriptures lay the greatest stress on the state of the affections in estimating our character and standing in the sight of God. The whole law of God, by which our practice is to be regulated, is briefly summed up by our Lord in these two great precepts directed immediately to the heart. "~~that~~ thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neigbour as thyself."* And the Apostle teaches us in emphatical language that no attainments in knowledge or zeal, no sacrifices however extraordinary, will render us acceptable to God without love in the heart. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling symbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."†— "The fruit of the spirit," says the same Apostle, "is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, faith, goodness, meekness, temperance."‡ The faithful preacher, therefore, will carefully explain the nature and warmly urge th enecessity of holy affections, of genuine experimental religion. He will insist on right tempers, dispositions and motives of the heart, as essentially requisite to sanctify our intellectual knowledge and render our actions pleasing to God. In executing this task we are to expect great and trying opposition. Besides the host of infidels and sensualists, who feel and express the bitterest enmity against all inward religion, we shall find even among professing Christians two classes of persons who will put our stedfastness on this point not a little to the test. The first consists of cold formalists, who rely on the supposed orthodoxy of their creed and the regularity of their external deportment as sufficient to carry them to heaven.— Their prejudices prevent them from distinguishing or aiming to distinguish between genuine religious experience and its contemptable counterfeits. From such persons we shall receive the odious characters of enthusiasts, fanaticks and madmen at the very mention of an experimental work of

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* *Matt. xxii.* 37, 38, 39. † 1 *Cor. xiii.* 1, 2, 3.
‡ *Gal. v.* 22, 23.

grace in the soul: and if they dared, they would pronounce one half of their bible mere rant and delusion. The other class consists of enthusiasts properly so called; people who, under pretence of supernatural impulses and immediate revelations from heaven, disdain to be enlightened by the ordinary means of instruction; who work themselnes up to a frensy of violent, irrational feelings, which they call conversion, the love of God, joy in the Holy Ghost, and in which they place the whole of religion. If we faithfully labour to correct these wild and dangerous notions; if we assert that the work of grace may exist in various degrees and be carried on by various methods in the souls of men; if we represent religious affection as a reasonable service founded upon knowledge and accompanied by reflection; if we describe love to God and love to our neighbour as deliberate, steady principles of action rather than occasional ebullitions of passion; we shall be vilified by these self-styled monopolists of seraphick love as strangers to that new birth which comes from heaven and enemies to vital piety. We shall be counted preachers artificially formed by men in colleges of human learning, base idolaters of money or of fame, not called of God to the ministry of his gospel. These are indeed trials of our patience. But we are not permitted therefore to shrink from our duty. Even what our God hath said on this important subject, that are we to speak; maintaining and guarding the scriptural religion of the heart against all the attacks of empty formalists on the one hand and of deluded enthusiasts on the other.

A second branch of practical preaching is the delineation of the particular duties prescribed by the gospel, with pressing exhortation to their performance. It is not enough that we explain and enforce holy affections or dispositions of the heart. These are general principles of conduct; and we must carefully admonish and assist our hearers in the application of them to prrticular cases. This position is so abuncantly exemplified in the holy scriptures that any formal proof of it here is deemed unnecessary. Let me observe that we ought especially to insist upon those duties of the Christian life which are of primary importance in themselves; those which are most disagreeable to depraved nature, and therefore most readily and generally neglected; those which are must discountenanced by the maxims and fashions of this ungodly world. Take as exemples, the regular exercises of divine worship in the family and the closet; the sanctification of the Lord's day; the religious education of children and servants; the rigid government of the

tongue; watchfulness over our thoughts and desires; stric integrity in all our dealings with others, doing to them as we would have them do to us; generous activity in relieving the distresses of our fellew creatures; forgiveness and love of our enemies; moderation in the pleasures of appetite and fancy; firmness, zeal and self-denial in promoting religion and good morals. These and all other duties of Christianity we are faithfully to urge at the expense of being reproached as precise, superstitious and illiberal. Directing our hearers to the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which alone they can serve God acceptably, we must constantly explain and inculcate the divine injunction that they "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God."* One of the best means to accomplish this purpose is to exhibit the example of the blessed Jesus, dwelling with diligent particularity on all its imitable features; and peremptorily excluding from the hope of heaven all who refuse to walk as he walked, "who went about doing good,"† "who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners."‡ Ought I not to add under this head that we are not to relinquish the inculcation of any duty for the sake of avoiding a conflict concerning it with some whom we may acknowledge in the general as our Christian brethren? Take as a specimen the duty of household baptism, as instituted by the Head of the church and practised by his Apostles. While we conscientiously maintain and observe this important ordinance of the gospel, what incessant, what vehement hostility have we to encounter from a certain branch of the Christian community! Such controversies are far from being agreeable to any who love concord and quietness. What then shall we do in such cases? Shall we tamely yield up truth and duty for the sake of a deceitful peace? No; Christian charity does not require, ministerial fidelity does not permit the surrender. Let us speak the truth in love; but let us speak it with boldness. We ought, indeed, to withstand errour so much the more earnestly, as it arrogates the garb of superiour sanctity, and spreads its baneful influence through the very church of Christ, the nursery of truth and righteousness.

The last article of practical preaching which I shall mention is the explicit reprehension of the particular sins of the people. If some ministers shrink from this work through motives of worldly policy, a few others seem to be sincerely

* *Mic. vi.* 8. † *Acts x.* 38.
‡ *Heb. vii.* 26.

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of opinion that it is a matter of little or no importance.—Convert the heart to God, say they, and the love and practice of sin will be banished of course. Now it is true that if the heart be converted to God the love of sin can no longer be its reigning principle. But it is not true that real converts are placed at once beyond the need of information, warning and reproof in regard to particular transgressions. Yea, those who have made considerable progress in religion do evidently still need the monitory voice of their pastors to guard them from danger, or to reclaim them from their occasional aberrations. Besides ; the first step towards the conversion of sinners to God through Jesus Christ is to convince them as impressively as possible of their great guilt and depravity. And how is this to be accomplished? Shall we content ourselves with proclaiming in general terms the doctrine of the fall, the total alienation of the human heart from God and righteousness ? Is it not manifestly necessary that we proceed to exemplify the doctrine and enforce it on the consciences of our hearers by charging them with the particular transgressions of which we know them to be guilty ? Certainly the bible abounds with this kind of preaching, according to divine injunction. " Cry aloud," said Jehovah to his prophet, " spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."* The preacher, therefore, is bound faithfully to notice and reprove the vices of the time and place in which his lot may be cast. Unpleasant as we may find the task to be, either in itself or in the consequences which it may draw upon us, our regard to God and our own consciences, as well as our compassion to our hearers, utterly forbids our neglecting it, or performing it in a hasty and superficial manner. If any sinful practice is supported by fashion and numbers, we are for that very reason to engage the more frequently and exert the more energy in its exhibition and censure. Such vices are profane cursing and swearing ; violation of the sabbath ; gaming in its various branches ; duelling ; unrighteous methods of gaining money, and extravagant ones of expending it. What is to become of the world if the clergy are too timid to attack these and a thousand other prevailing iniquities in their strong holds ? Many say they do not wish to be frightened into religion. Alas, it is too obvious that multitudes will neither be frightened nor persuaded into it. But if fear be, as it undoubtedly is, one of the handles of the hu-

* *Isa. lviii.* 1.

man soul, we must seize it, if possible, with a vigorous grasp; proclaiming the wrath of God, the fire of eternal damnation, against every sinner who refuses to repent and obey the gospel. If transgressors calculate on exemption from the denunciations of the pulpit on account of their wealth, talents or elevated stations, we are to disappoint their arrogant hopes by our impartiality. And this we should do the more promptly as the vicious examples of such persons are the more apt to spread corruption around them. It was to an arbitrary monarch in the midst of his sycophants that the prophet who has furnished my text denounced the vengeance of the Almighty. Above all, if any who call themselves disciples of Christ practise sin, under the pretext of Christian liberty, unavoidable infirmity, or the smallness of the fault, we are to warn them of their danger with all speed and sincerity, and strain every nerve to snatch them from the dreadful precipice on which they stand. In a word, while meekness, love and due respect to the people accompany all our words and actions, as well in the pulpit as out of it, let us never forget that we are the responsible messengers of God to his creatures; and that against all sin, whatever shapes or excuses it may assume, we are to carry on an unremitting war, a war of absolute extermination. The performance of this duty will greatly try our firmness and self-denial. Some will sneer at our zeal about what they ignorantly account trifles. Others, filled with bitter resentment, will raise a mighty cry against us for throwing out personal reflections, which is the name they give to honest reproofs, and will wonder how we presume to deal with them so plainly. The gay and fashionable will revile us for attacking their favourite but pernicious amusements. And antinomian professors of religion will stigmatize us as departimg from the glorious grace of the gospel. Our temporal support from the people may be diminished, or even totally withdrawn. We may lose friendships dearer to us than silver or gold. It is needful that we keep our minds in a state of preparation for these painful consequences, or whatever others God may suffer our faithfulness in this and other respects to bring upon us. Times have been when his ministers were called to lay down their lives for doing their duty. Through divine grace they "counted not their lives dear to themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus."* After their exam-

* *Acts xx. 24.*

ple we ought to suffer cheerfully every distress which can be inflicted by the ungodly rather than forfeit an approving conscience and the smiles of our heavenly Father.

I cannot close my survey of ministerial fidelity without reminding you that after all our utmost exertions the success of our labours depend entirely upon the sovereign pleasure of God. Our talents, our improvements in knowledge, our time and our strength are gifts of his bounty.—We need his grace continually to make us faithful in his service. And it is only by the influences of his Holy Spirit that our best performances in the sanctuary can become in any degree instrumental to the conversion and salvation of the people. "Paul may plant, Apolles may water, but God giveth the increase."* It is, therefore, no small part of our duty as faithful servants of God that we cultivate in ourselves the profoundest humility, the most impressive conviction of our dependence upon his mercy. Constant and fervent prayer to the Father in the name of his Son Jesus Christ should accompany all our preparations for the pulpit, and every discharge of its exercises; that we may be made in some good measure able and worthy ministers of the new testament, and that our labours may be rendered effectual to the glory of God, and the eternal welfare of our hearers.

III. And now, brethren, it only remains to suggest very briefly the motives which urge you to this great duty of faithfulness in the sacred office. As you have imposed the task, you will candidly receive the word of exhortation from a brother younger than most of you in years and in the ministry. You will suffer one who would feel greater pleasure in sitting as a learner at your feet to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

Consider then, in the first place, your engagements to God. Besides his rich grace in our conversion, each of us, probably, may have experienced some remarkable and obligatory interpositions of his kind providence, contributing to form our call to the holy ministry. It is proper to bring such things often into serious and thankful review. But more especially, we ought habitually to reflect, each for himself, on that solemn hour when we formally took the office upon us, and received in the appointed order our commission for its execution. How awful was the transaction! With what lowly sef-abasement, what sincere resolutions, what earnest petitions for strength from above, what tremr-

* 1 *Cor. iii.* 6.

bling solicitude for the event, did we promise to our God, before his ministers, his people and the world, that we would "be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition might arise unto us on that account!" Should we then fail through sloth, pusilanimity or a worldly spirit, it would be no common precept disobeyed, no common promise broken, but a vow of the most sacred nature shamefully violated. How enormous would be the guilt, how dreadful the consequences! Do we value consistency of character? Do we regard the peace of our own breasts, the approbation of our God? Then let us by his strengthening grace be faithful in the ministry with which he has condescended to invest us, and which we have so solemnly undertaken to perform.

Again; consider the vast number and dismal condition of unconverted sinners. The whole world, we know, is fallen from God, and lieth in wickedness and ruin. Many nations are at this hour involved in gross heathen darkness, brutalized by innumerable abominations. But turn your view nearer home. The wretched slaves of sin, the captives of the devil, surround you on every side. They are your fellow citizens, your neighbours, your friends, your kindred. In the veins of some of them flows, perhaps, your own blood. Estranged from God, forgetful of death and judgment, they rush forward heedless and undismayed; filling up the measure of their iniquities, while the Almighty is preparing his sword of vengeance to cut them off, and hell from beneath opens to receive them at their coming. One or another sinks every day; and none is sure of being spared a single hour. Does not the benevolent heart bleed at such a scene? Does it not anxiously inquire, is there any way to save these infatuated destroyers of themselves, any means to pluck them as brands from the burning? Can I be instrumental, and if so, in what way, to rescue immortals from perdition? I answer, it is possible for every Christian to be instrumental in this blessed work by prayer, a holy example and the diligent discharge of the duties of his station. But to you especially, ye ministers of the gospel, is the glorious office assigned, under God, of saving souls alive. And you are to do it principally by faithful preaching. And can we be remiss, can we slumber in circumstances so interesting? Have not we ourselves tasted the wormwood and the gall of sin? Do we not know the terrours of the Lord? Let us reflect before we enter the pulpit, and while we stand in it, that we are warning sinners to fly from the wrath to come,

the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Tremendous words! No heart can conceive their full import. And must every soul that dies unconverted and unpardoned bear the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God without intermission or hope of release to all eternity? Surely if we have any bowels of compassion such considerations will make us faithful in proclaiming to our hearers their danger and the remedy provided for them in the gospel.

Farther; consider what great things have been done and suffered by Christ the Son of God for the salvation of sinners. To animate our zeal, as well as for a thousand other reasons, let us meditate often on his humiliation, his life and his death. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Let us accompany him in thought to the garden of his agony, to the unrighteous tribunal of his enemies, to the mount where he was cricified. How complicated, how poignant were his sufferings! Yet all the cruel indignities which he endured from men, all the bodily tortures of the scurge, the thorns and the cross, were small things when compared with the weight of his Father's wrath which he bore in our stead. Surely none but an infinite mind can fully conceive the horrours of that hour when he cried, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! At such a time it was right, it was decorous that the earth should tremble and the sun shroud his face in darkness.— With what meekness did the Lamb of God drain the bitter cup of divine indignation to the dregs! Then having pronounced the mighty work of redemption finished, he bowed his sacred head and died. Such love did the Son of God exercise towards perishing sinners, towards us and our brethren of the fallen race. And can we be unfaithful in our ministry with such an example before our eyes? I trust I may boldly answer, it is impossible. Blessed Jesus! We will persevere in calling and training the souls redeemed by thy blood. We will bury, we will forget our little grievances and troubles at the foot of thy cross. We will rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for thy sake.

Finally; consider the glorious reward which awaits the faithful minister. Let none contemn this as a narrow, mercenary motive. To seek our own happiness in advancing the glory of God and the salvation of mankind is the very reverse of a mercenary conduct. In this view our divine Master himself had respect to the joy that was set before him, when he endured the cross, despising the shame. Porbably it rarely happens that a servant of God preaches his

word faithfully without seeing, sooner or later, some good fruit of his labours. And does not the conversion of one soul abundantly compensate years of toil and suffering? Faithful minister of Christ, I appeal to thy heart: could crowns, and empires give thee such exquisite delight as thou hast tasted in the consciousness of being instrumental to the conversion of a single soul? I know thy answer.—But look beyond this fleeting scene to the heavenly world, where the people of God, and especially his ministers, rest from their labours, and their works follow them. There shall they who have turned many to righteousness shine as the stars forever and ever. Yet as success is not at our command, as it is in no sense personally ours, but the work and gift of God alone; it shall not be the measure by which he will dispense the rewards of his grace to them who love and serve him. He knows every heart; and his people shall receive at his hands according to that which they have honestly intended and laboured to do for his glory, whether their aims were accomplished or not. How diminutive will our present sorrows and sacrifices appear in that day when, standing on the threshold of our Father's house above, we shall hear that transporting sentence, well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

I cannot persuade myself to conclude this discourse without addressing a few words to the people. You see the comprehensive and awful task which lies before your ministers. Remember, I beseech you, that every duty enjoined upon them implies a corresponding and equally indispensable duty on your part. If they are God's messengers to you and ambassadours of Jesus Christ; you are required to behave towards them with respect and love suitable to their office. How strongly does our Lord express himself on this subject: "he that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you dispiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."* If it is the duty of your pastors to devote their time and their faculties to your spiritual service in the work of the ministry; it is your duty to render them such a comfortable temporal maintenance as the Lord hath ordained, and as he may enable you to afford. If they are to preach to you faithfully the doctrines of revealed truth, which are able to make you wise unto salvation; you are to hear them, not indeed with blind submission, but with attention and docility, with unprejudiced love of the truth, with humble prayer to God that by

* *Luke x.* 16.

their instructions you may grow daily in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If they are to teach you the good and the right way of practical religion, insisting on holiness of heart and life, leading you in the path of duty and warning you against the allurements of sin: you are to receive their admonitions and reproofs in the spirit of meekness and obedience. If they are tried with afflictions in the execution of their ministerial functions; you are to strengthen their hands and comfort them, crying earnestly to God that he may bestow his blessings and consolations upon them. Of all the rich gifts of God's beneficent providence to the world a faithful ministry is one of the most precious in itself and important in its consequences: and the people who enjoy it are to answer for it at the great day of judgment accordingly.—Let ministers and people imprint the awful lesson deeply on their hearts that they are to meet at the tribunal of Almighty God, there to render an impartial account of their respective actions, and to receive according to that which they have done, whether it be good or evil. Hear the word of the Lord on this most interesting subject: "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul."* May God of his infinite mercy grant to us all, preachers and hearers, that we may render up our final account with joy and not with grief; and that we may receive together an eternal inheritance of glory in his heavenly kingdom through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

* *Ezek. xxxiii.* 7, 8. 9.